The firm Belief of a future Reward a powerful Motive to Obedience and a good Life.

A

SERMON

PREACHED

AT

CHRIST CHURCH

In BOSTON,

AUGUST 20. 1765.

At the FUNERAL of the

Rev. TIMOTHY CUTLER, D.D.

LATE RECTOR OF SAID CHURCH.

By *HENRY CANER*, A. M.

MINISTER OF KING'S CHAPEL.

Publish'd at the Request of the Wardens and Vestry of Christ Church.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY THOMAS AND JOHN FLEET IN CORNHILL,

MDCCLXV.

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THE FUTURE REWARD A SUITABLE MOTIVE OF RELIGION.

HEBREWS XI. 26.

——For he had reſpect unto the recompence of the reward.

TO diſengage yourſelves ſometimes from the little intereſts and amuſements of life, to call off the mind from ſenſual purſuits to ſerioufneſs and recollection, is both highly uſeful in itſelf, and is alſo matter of poſitive duty, recommended in various precepts of holy writ.

By a long and cloſe attention to the pleaſures, the buſineſs, but eſpecially the vanities of life, men grow inſenſible to things of more ſolemn conſequence; the mind gradually acquires

quires a kind of habitual ſtupidity as to ſpiritual pleaſures, and in conſequence of this a fatal diſreliſh of them too; for the faculties of the mind as well as of the body, are improved and brightned by proper exerciſe, and acquire their various taſtes of pleaſure and averſion from the objects upon which they are chiefly employed.

As this is a ſtate which oftentimes inſenſibly ſteals upon a Chriſtian, from that neceſſary intercourſe with ſenſual objects which the condition of his nature requires; it becomes a matter of great importance, frequently to examine the temper and diſpoſition of the ſoul; its love and averſion, its ſatisfaction and diſtaſte, that we may be enabled to judge, whether its chief pleaſure be rational, and becoming the dignity of its high original; but eſpecially to look forward to that ſolemn period, which muſt ſhortly cloſe the ſcene of all preſent enjoyments, and lay open an unclouded proſpect of eternity. To render this proſpect deſirable now, and agreeable when it arrives, the example recorded in the text may be highly uſeful, ſince neither the troubles nor temptations of this life, can have much influence upon him, who by a lively faith and ſteadfaſt hope has *reſpect to the recompence of the reward.*

The

The author of this epiſtle, at the 6th verſe of this chapter had laid down this general propoſition, that *God is a rewarder of them that diligently ſeek him*; and that the belief of this propoſition is neceſſary to invite our addreſſes and application to him; to encourage us in the way of godlineſs, to confirm our diligence and perſeverance, and more eſpecially to animate and ſupport us under the afflictions and perſecutions which at any time befall us. In proof of what he had aſſerted, he proceeds to exemplify the truth of it, by adducing ſundry inſtances of holy men, who, in virtue of this faith, (i. e. the firm belief that God would finally reward them for their ſufferings) had chearfully undergone the ſevereſt inſtances of perſecution, and had even laid down their lives in the joyful expectation of a glorious reward, which God had reſerved for them in heaven. The particular inſtance in the text, by a peculiar diſpoſition of divine providence, did not indeed proceed to this laſt extremity, God having preſerved this man to become the inſtrument of a moſt wonderful and gracious œconomy, which, agreeable to the purpoſes of his wiſdom, was then ripe for being diſcloſed to the world. But in the firmneſs of his virtue,

tue, the ſtrength and reſolution of his faith, and his confidence of an inviſible reward, he expoſed himſelf to very great trials, and even to the apparent danger of laying down his life a ſacrifice to his faith.

He had a great intereſt in the Egyptian court, and ſtood fair for being advanced to the higheſt honours and intereſts of it; and yet he voluntarily rejected and deſpiſed theſe advantages, in proſpect of a future recompence; *chuſing*, as the apoſtle ſays, *rather to ſuffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleaſures of ſin for a ſeaſon.*

We ſee then what force there is in this motive of a future reward, when firmly believed. —We ſee what influence it had in fact upon thoſe many worthies whom the apoſtle hath recorded.—Why is that influence abated in latter ages? Is the reward leſs certain to us than it was to them? Or is the proſpect of it obſcur'd under the preſent diſpenſation of the goſpel? Nay verily, it is glorioufly opened and enlarged. We have not only their teſtimony, but a cloud of witneſſes beſides, inviting us to *run the race that is ſet before us* with faith and patience,

looking

looking eſpecially *to Jeſus the author and finiſher of* that *faith, who for the joy that was ſet before him, endured the croſs, deſpiſing the ſhame, and is* now poſſeſſed of the reward, being *ſet down at the right hand* of the throne *of God.*

Bleſſed be God! we are not called to ſo ſevere an exerciſe of our faith, we have neither reſiſted, nor have we been required to reſiſt unto blood, in our warfare with ſin. So much eaſier is our task, than that which fell to the lot of God's ſaints under the old diſpenſation, or than that which became the portion of thoſe champions who were firſt charged with propagating the new. They are the pleaſures, not the perſecutions, the honours, not the terrors of the world, with which we are required to contend; the riches and intereſts, the ambition and vanity, the luſts and corruptions that ſolicit our regards; theſe caſt a veil over the proſpect of future glories, and dim the brightneſs of the unfading crown of immortality. But if our religion has provided us with motives that are ſufficient to ſupport men under perſecutions and ſufferings, ſurely the ſame motives ſhould be allowed ſufficient to conquer the paſſions and pleaſures, the luſts and vanities of the world, with all other ſinful temptations that beſet us.

Some

Some indeed have refined upon the apoſtle's doctrine, by declaring, that however the proſpect of a reward might be admitted as an encouragement to men under the former ſervile diſpenſation, yet it is unworthy to enter into the regards of a chriſtian, who ought to be influenced by more generous motives, nor admit any thing as an encouragement to duty, but what ſolely terminates upon the love of God and Chriſt; every thing but this, they eſteem ſelfiſh and mercenary, unworthy the ſpirit of the goſpel. This I apprehend to be refining upon the chriſtian religion, ſince not only the old teſtament worthies looked forward to the glories which ſhould after be revealed, but the chriſtian ſaints and martyrs were encouraged to contend for the prize of their high calling, to preſs forward towards it, and to have *reſpect to the recompence of reward*, to the crown of life, which God hath reſerved for ſuch as love him. Nay, and to put the matter beyond all diſpute, our bleſſed Saviour himſelf is ſaid to have *endured the croſs, for the joy that was ſet before him.* We may therefore very well eſteem this motive as a lawful ſpur and incentive to duty, which is confeſſedly allowed to have animated the ſaints under the old teſtament, and martyrs under the new, and even to have attracted the regards of the captain of our ſalvation himſelf.

Beſides,

Beſides, it ought to be conſidered, that the very reward itſelf, which is held forth to encourage us, can in its own nature have no weight or influence, till the love of God has taken place in the heart. They diſtinguiſh therefore without a difference, who make the love of God, and the deſire of a future reward inconſiſtent with each other. For wherein does the future reward conſiſt, but in the enjoyment of God, and thoſe pleaſures which perpetually flow from the bleſſed viſion of him, and the capacity of tranſcribing continually his perfections? But as great a happineſs as this is, it cannot, when truly underſtood, be ſought after, or even deſired, by thoſe who are deſtitute of the love of God. A man muſt have a real affection for God, muſt be renewed after the divine image, in righteouſneſs and true holineſs, before he is really capable of having a due *reſpect to the recompence of reward*, before he can feel the want, or perceive the excellency of it, or be at all influenced by it. They quite miſtake the thing, and ſhew themſelves to be entirely ignorant of the nature of the future ſtate, who imagine it to conſiſt in any thing but a larger participation of God's moral perfections, and a conſtant eternally uninterrupted

improvement in them. This is the heavenly life, to be conſtantly beholding, admiring, praiſing, imitating God, and improving in new and further degrees of moral and ſpiritual perfection: And in this alſo conſiſts the future reward. To look for any other, or to entertain any other lower notion or conception of it than this, is rather to expect a mahometan paradiſe than a chriſtian heaven.

And I wiſh this were more thoroughly conſidered and weighed than I fear it commonly is. I am perſuaded it would have a good effect upon mens lives, and would perhaps teach ſome people to fear and tremble at their condition, who think themſelves in a fair way to heaven: For too many look upon the future ſtate rather as a place than a condition. It is like ſome fine and healthful climate (they think) where, as there will be no place for pain or evil, or miſery, for ſickneſs or ſorrow, for trouble or diſappointment; ſo it will abound with the moſt agreeable pleaſures, the moſt raviſhing delights and entertainments, that their hearts can wiſh for. But then unfortunately they too often form their notions of the pleaſures and entertainments they ſhall receive, from thoſe

enjoyments

enjoyments with which they have been chiefly delighted here, only they imagine that they will be some how or other greatly improved and refin'd beyond what they have ever yet experienced. Now where such sensual notions as these prevail, 'tis no wonder that men should be careless and negligent of their lives, since if they have but time to ask mercy and forgiveness of God and to assure him that they have no hatred or aversion to him, but are sincerely desirous of going to heaven, they conclude they have done enough to engage the divine compassion, and that God will therefore undoubtedly hearken to their requests.—But now should these men have their eyes open'd, and be taught to see that heaven and a future reward are quite different things from what they have all along apprehended them to be, that they consist in a divine temper and disposition of soul, which is form'd after the image of God, and participates of his nature and perfections, and that in proportion to the degrees of this spiritual improvement, are the degrees of their happiness and enjoyment; that these joys and that happiness are impossible to be entertained or embraced, but by those who have previously acquired such a conformity to the image of God.—I say if

all this were firmly entertained, and men embraced theſe, which are the true notions of future happineſs; they would be in much leſs danger of misjudging their own condition, and would be more ſolicitous of acquiring that holineſs here, without which they will never be admitted to ſee God hereafter.

It is a folly for any man to flatter or deceive himſelf in a matter of ſuch infinite concernment as that of eternal happineſs, but 'tis terrible to think of an everlaſting exiſtence in miſery. The affair in regard to each muſt be ſettled in this life, after which it becomes irreverſible. The future judgment makes no real alteration, it is only declaratory of what we ourſelves eſtabliſh, by our own good or ill conduct in life. The capacity will indeed be enlarged after that event, to feel a full flow of happineſs, or the full weight of God's wrath reſpectively, according to the ſentence of each. But they are in a conditional ſtate of election or reprobation previous to that period, and would they but impartially weigh their own temper and diſpoſition, and conduct towards God, they might nearly form a judgment of their ſtate, and by thus judging themſelves by a proper care and circumſpection might be led to prevent the judgment of God.

Thus

Thus have I endeavoured to illuſtrate and confirm the apoſtolic doctrine in the text, by proving that it is lawful to have reſpect to the recompence of reward. And if this doctrine be true, what a noble motive is it, to ſupport the chriſtian under the greateſt troubles and difficulties that can befall him in this life?

The force of this motive would appear indeed to greater advantage by conſidering the nature of that reward which we are thus encouraged to aſpire after.—But in truth, of this I am able to ſay but little—for the things that God hath reſerved for us in heaven, are too big for utterance, or even for conception. The mind is overborn and ſinks under the weight of its own images, when it labours to comprehend the glories of the future ſtate. Glorious things are indeed ſpoken of the city of God in the holy ſcriptures; but a perfect and diſtinct image of them is beyond mortal apprehenſion. And therefore it is that the joys and glories of that ſtate are repreſented by crowns and ſceptres, and ſuch other enſigns of royalty and ſplendor, as imply the greateſt dignity and enjoyment that we are acquainted with. Imperfect however as our conceptions are,

are, they are ſufficient to animate our fortitude under trials and temptations, and to inſpire us with diligence and induſtry in the work of the Lord, ſince we have the higheſt aſſurance that *our labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord.*

Even that ſolemn employment of ours (my reverend brethren) filled with ſo many cares and inquietudes, and requiring ſo much firmneſs and diligence, ſo much wiſdom and prudence to render it ſucceſsful, if it be diſcharged with integrity and a good conſcience, will meet with a reward infinitely beyond all the labours and difficulties of it; for they who are thus wiſe we are told *ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, and they that turn many to righteouſneſs as the ſtars for ever and ever.*

Were it indeed poſſible for me to repreſent the joys of that bleſſed kingdom, and the never fading pleaſures that flow at God's right hand, could I deſcribe the exalted ſatisfaction that ariſes from the bleſſed viſion of God, from the company and converſation of ſaints and angels, of cherubim and ſeraphim, the noble army of martyrs, the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, the general aſſembly and church of the firſt-

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born, but above all from the ſmiles of Jeſus the redeemer, the mediator of the new covenant; could I paint theſe, and the thouſand other excellencies and entertainments with which that ſtate abounds in their proper colours, and were your faculties alſo enlarged and ſtrengthned to apprehend them; then ſhould I not doubt of perſuading every one here preſent to deſpiſe the difficulties, the dangers and temptations that beſet them in this mortal ſtate, tho' they were indeed much greater and more numerous than they truly are.

In view of this recompence, and ſupported by the proſpect of this glorious reward, our departed friend and brother was not only encouraged to diſcharge the important duties of that ſtation to which the providence of God had call'd him, with fidelity and diligence; but was alſo enabled to undergo a long and grievous weight of affliction, which the ſame wiſe and righteous providence thought fit to lay upon him, with exemplary patience, fortitude and reſignation. Earneſtly deſirous indeed he was to bring glory to God, and to promote the happineſs and ſalvation of men, particularly of the flock committed to his charge by a

further

further exerciſe of his miniſtry, yet referred his deſires to the will and wiſdom of his bleſſed maſter, who beſt knows how to diſpoſe of his ſervants, and what inſtruments to employ for effecting the purpoſes of his grace. Few men indeed have had a larger opportunity of exerciſing the miniſterial function, or fewer interruptions in it; and very few I am perſuaded have made a more faithful and diligent uſe of the opportunities afforded them. For above thirty years (I ſuppoſe) he was ſcarce detained a day, by ſickneſs or ſuch like accident, from officiating in the public duties of the church; but it pleaſed God in his righteous providence, for the laſt nine years of his life, to lay him under an incapacity for public ſervice. Such a long courſe of preceeding health was certainly a very ſingular bleſſing of God, which this worthy perſon failed not to improve to the beſt advantage of himſelf, and of the people committed to his charge.

As he was born and educated in this neighbourhood, he was ſo generally well known among you, that I can offer little in the way of character concerning this faithful ſervant of Chriſt, but what moſt of you are already well

acquainted

acquainted with. It may however be a ſatisfaction to ſome who had leſs knowledge of him to be inform'd, that under the advantage of a good natural capacity, joined with ſingular diligence and application, he made an early proficiency in uſeful literature, and was accordingly ſoon diſtinguiſhed as likely to become eminent in his profeſſion. As he turned his mind chiefly to theological ſtudies, and the cultivation of thoſe languages that might aſſiſt him in acquiring a competent knowledge of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, he had ſoon a call to the miniſtry in a neighbouring government. The duties of this ſtation he diſcharged with indefatigable diligence and fidelity, and acquired the univerſal love and reſpect of his people. But he was not ſuffer'd to continue long here. His learning and piety, his wiſdom and prudence, joined with an excellent ſpirit of government, recommended him to a ſtill more public employment, and he was accordingly choſen to preſide over a ſeminary of learning which had then newly been eſtabliſhed. This preferment he enjoyed with honour to himſelf, and with the approbation of the public, till in the courſe of reading and critical enquiry, he found himſelf under a neceſſity of conforming to the church of England. This event occaſion'd his diſmiſſion from that

honourable employment; and it may juſtly as well as charitably be ſuppoſed, that nothing but the obligations of conſcience could have induced him, under the burden of a large and increaſing family, and without any certain proſpects, to throw up all preſent viſible ſupport. In this critical juncture however he providentially received an invitation to qualify himſelf for performing the miniſterial office in this church. He look'd upon this as a diſpoſition of divine providence in his favour, and therefore readily accepted the invitation, and proceeded to England to offer himſelf for holy orders. His reputation for learning and good morals, with the recommendatory teſtimonies he carried from hence, ſoon procured him what he deſired, and moreover engaged the notice of many eminent perſons at both univerſity's, from each of which he received the compliment of an honorary degree of Doctor in Divinity. After a ſhort ſtay in England he returned and entered upon the duties of his pariſh.

How faithfully in word in doctrine and example he has ſince diſcharged the paſtoral office, you, his peculiar charge, his dear children in the goſpel, with whom he travailed in birth that Chriſt might be formed in you, are beſt

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able to teſtify.—But others alſo can witneſs to his wiſdom and prudence, to his tender care and ſolicitude to preſerve peace and unity in the church, or to reſtore it where it was wanting.—He was inflexible indeed in his principles, theſe he accounted ſacred. And as he had deliberately entertained a high opinion of the conſtitution of the church of England, ſo he was ever zealous in its defence. At the ſame time he took particular care not to vary from its rules, but endeavoured to ſupport its intereſts and preſerve its authority with great integrity. His firmneſs and zeal, his attachment and perſeverance in the true faith and principles of the chriſtian religion deſerve the greateſt notice, at a time when ſo many ſit looſe to the fundamental articles of it, think lightly of the great myſteries of our redemption by Chriſt, and if they ſtop ſhort of barefaced infidelity, plunge into the gulph or dead ſea of latitudinarianiſm, under the ſpecious name of morality.

In ſhort our departed friend was a wiſe, a learned, and pious man, a good chriſtian, a faithful ſteward of the myſteries of God, a tried ſoldier and champion of Jeſus Chriſt, who in proſpect of the recompence of the reward that

was ſet before him deſpiſed the frowns and flatteries of the world, maintained his great maſters cauſe with undaunted courage and ſteadfaſt reſolution, and is now (we truſt) enter'd into the poſſeſſion of the joy of his Lord.

It may poſſibly be objected that I have fallen ſhort of ſaying what this great and eminently worthy perſon deſerved—I am ſenſible I have ſo.—Let it be my apology, that for very many years I have had the honour of an intimate friendſhip with him; and I choſe rather to be deficient, than by ſaying all that he deſerved, to open the voice of ſlander, or provoke the ſting of envy. I will venture to add, that it will be no unbecoming teſtimony of our regard to pray that the great Lord of the harveſt will ſend forth more ſuch faithful labourers into his harveſt.

As to you whom nature and family connections had render'd more particularly dear to him, who were happy in his love, guided by his counſels, and comforted by his preſence, you cannot indeed but mourn the loſs of a tender husband and an affectionate father; yet let both remember from whoſe wiſe and righteous providence the viſitation is derived, and let that

compoſe

compoſe your minds.—Bleſs God that the enjoyment was continued to you ſo long, that he was not gathered to the grave but in peace and in a good old age.—Be perſuaded to caſt your hope and truſt upon that rock of ages, who is a never failing refuge to ſuch as confide in him. Make him then your friend, your husband, your father, and your comforter. Submit your wills to his with a perfect reſignation, and he will lead you ſafely by his counſel thro' this wilderneſs of ſorrow and affliction, and after that beſtow on you "the recompence of the reward," a never fading crown of life and glory.

And now as to you the people of his charge, to whom God had entruſted the care of your ſouls; you cannot eaſily forget this your ſpiritual father; tho' God had for ſome years paſt ſuſpended him from his paſtoral duty, and hath now called him to himſelf, yet you cannot but remember with gratitude, *his* former *work and labour of love.* Call to mind his frequent exhortations and earneſt entreaties, that you would hearken to the voice of Jeſus Chriſt in the goſpel, that you would cloſe with the terms of ſalvation offer'd by him, and by repentance, faith and obedience get an intereſt in the promiſes

miſes of the new covenant. He has led you with affectionate tenderneſs, as a ſhepherd does his flock.—He has fed you with the ſincere milk of the word, that you might grow thereby, and be nouriſhed up unto life eternal. Being a *ready ſcribe, inſtructed in* the will of God, he *brought forth out of his treaſures things new and old*, and made you abundant partakers of ſpiritual things. He ceaſed not for above thirty years to warn every man, and teach every man that he *might preſent you faultleſs before the throne of glory with exceeding joy* both to himſelf and you.—He is now gone to give account of his ſtewardſhip to the great Lord of all, who reſerveth the recompence of reward for ſuch as have been faithful in his ſervice.—Recall to mind his admonitions and pious inſtructions, ſo, altho' he be dead, he ſhall yet ſpeak to you in thoſe ſalutary doctrines and godly exhortations, he formerly delivered.

And while you thus bear in remembrance his faithfulneſs and diligence in your ſervice, be not unmindful to ſhew kindneſs to his houſe. The widow and the fatherleſs are always entitled to the tendereſt regards, but more eſpecially ſo, where particular connections and obligations concurr to recommend them to your notice and affections.

To

To conclude, having the recompence of the reward in view, a glorious crown of life and immortality, let us all both miniſters and people after the worthy example of our departed brother, determine to be ſteadfaſt and unmoveable in the faith and obedience of the goſpel, in ſpite of all the difficulties and diſcouragements that may beſet us, relying on the grace of Chriſt, who in like manner in proſpect of the joy that was ſet before him endured infinitely greater trials than fall to the lot of any of us. And how inexpreſſible will that joy be to every one who ſhall thus in the faith and in the fear of God, perſevere unto the end.—How refreſhing a conſolation in particular will every conſcientious paſtor of the chriſtian church find in himſelf, when at the cloſe of his labours, when the evening of life begins to lengthen his ſhadow and the grave threatens to caſt a veil of darkneſs around him, he can look back on a life early dedicated, and faithfully ſpent in the ſervice of God, and his church? How chearful thoughts, and what comfortable expectations will he have on his death bed? When he ſhall have good ground to hope, that as he has endeavoured to fit and prepare others for that ſolemn ſcene, and for a happy change,

ſo by the merits and mediation of his ever bleſſed redeemer his own ſins ſhall be blotted out, and his labours accepted before the great tribunal. How happy to be able to ſay with the great apoſtle, "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, I have finiſh'd my courſe, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life." How much happier ſtill to hear that bleſſed welcome of his Lord, "Well done good and faithful ſervant, thou haſt been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

Let me ſhut up this whole diſcourſe with that exhortation of the apoſtle directed alike to all whether paſtors or people.

"My beloved brethren be ye ſteadfaſt unmoveable always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord."

To God the Father the Son and the Holy Ghoſt be all Glory and Honor Dominion and Power now and forevermore. AMEN.

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